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ABSTRACT

This study examines intra-partnership communication in school-university collaboration, and considers how participant interaction affects a collaborative's capacity for promoting curricular and instructional change. The study examines two projects utilizing distinct collaborative approaches: "The Academic Alliance for Improved Social Studies Teaching," a social studies improvement collaborative involving 27 Phoenix, Arizona, elementary classroom teachers and 12 support personnel; and "The Middle Grades Project," a more formal, larger collaborative to restructure and revitalize programs at three Indiana schools. Comparative, interpretive analysis revealed that collaborators typically communicated orally, in fairly linear fashion, and through identifiable, if sometimes hazily defined networks. Their interchange seemed episodic and was often influenced by dynamic advocates, external events, and personal politics. As they interacted, participants implemented significant programmatic change. Findings also suggested a relationship between the scope and direction of intra-partnership communication, participants' sense of ownership and empowerment, their willingness to change, and the degree to which innovations were adopted. Includes 26 references. (JDD)

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Communication within School-University Partnerships and Its Effect on Curricular Change

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Running Head: COMMUNICATION, PARTNERSHIPS, AND CURRICULAR CHANGE

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from two projects utilizing distinct models of school-university collaboration to promote curricular change. Interpretive and comparative analysis focused on a central element within effective partnerships, communication, and its interaction with participants' sense of ownership and empowerment, willingness to alter current practice, and the degree to which innovation is implemented. Findings reveal that collaborators typically communicated orally, in fairly linear fashion, and through identifiable, if sometimes hazily defined networks. Their interchange seemed episodic and was often influenced by dynamic advocates, external events, and personal politics. As they interacted, moreover, participants implemented significant programmatic change. Findings also suggest a relationship between the scope and direction of intra-partnership communication, participants sense of ownership and empowerment, their willingness to change, and the degree to which innovations are adopted.

Communication within School-University Partnerships and Its Effect on Curricular Change

Advocates champion school-university partnerships as the means to end a discouraging cycle that has long marked American schooling. While insisting that collaboration can break the gridlock that has stalled so many school reforms, proponents seldom present evidence supporting this proposition and rarely investigate factors influencing the collaborative process. This study examines one key factor, intra-partnership communication, and considers how participant interaction affects a collaborative's capacity for promoting curricular and instructional change.

For over a century, pedagogues and the public have dictated reform agendas and legislative mandates. Relentlessly, theorists and practitioners have devised programs departing from the educational mainstream. Yet, curriculum and the methods used to deliver it have remained relatively constant, prompting reformers to reissue change manifestos and reintroduce alternative practices with discouraging regularity (Cuban, 1990).

The barriers to school improvement have been variously characterized. Schools resist change because they function primarily as instruments for ideological and social control (Apple, 1977; Popkewitz, 1988). Because of their precarious financial and governance systems, schools must struggle to retain constituent loyalty, limiting practitioners' inclination and ability to transform existing programs (Cuban, 1990). Other theorists insist that irrationality dooms reform movements to failure. Innovations rarely impact schools because change agents ignore past lessons (Hertzberg, 1982), wage lengthy reform campaigns despite

insufficient resources (Williams, 1988), and do little to reverse practitioners' suspicions that effective processes for implementing change will never be delineated (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975).

While various obstacles certainly hindered past reformers, three related factors have emerged which might lower these barriers and facilitate meaningful school improvement. First, a growing knowledge base more clearly explains the complex interactions comprising the educational change process (Fullan, 1982; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988). Second, researchers have formulated comprehensive models for designing and implementing school reforms (Hall & Hord, 1987; Joyce, Hersh, & McKibbin, 1983). Third, proponents advance school-university collaboration as a vehicle for curricular and instructional innovation (Goodlad, 1987; Lieberman, 1986).

As described by adherents, collaboration transcends traditional school-university coordination, coalition, or cooperation. A partnership is an open-ended, complicated, messy, intensely personal, sometimes frustrating, and potentially exhausting operation that enhances reform possibilities. Collaboration can generate long-term, localized, interactive school improvement programs more productive than the "quick-fix," generic, "top-down" projects which past reformers tried to impose. Advocates support these claims with indications that partnerships produce change-related effects, such as staff empowerment, reduced teacher isolation, and a school-wide sense of mission (DeBevoise, 1986; Intriligator, 1983; Wilbur, Lambert, & Young, 1988).

The apparent power of partnerships to implement reform initiatives stems from parallels between emerging change theory and the

collaborative process. School-university collaboration, by its very nature, resembles comprehensive change models and reflects principles for meaningful innovation. Partnerships are flexible, situation-specific, practitioner-formulated and monitored, interactive, relatively egalitarian, systematic, and directed at a problem which participants perceive. In such a change-oriented, collaborative environment, professors and practitioners might well introduce, maintain, and assess the effectiveness of programmatic improvements with significant, lasting results.

Using partnerships to generate innovative school practices seems potentially very productive, but somewhat difficult to realize since the collaborative process remains largely unexplored territory. The literature advancing school-university collaboration is persuasive/descriptive rather than empirical/analytical. Educators remain uncertain regarding how collaboratives function and have not explicated conditions which nurture their operation. They confuse collaboration with institutional cooperation, lack tested implementation procedures, and champion collaboratives without knowing their effects.

Many partnership advocates acknowledge this need for interpretive studies examining certain aspects of collaboration in diverse settings. Among their targets for research, participant behavior seems central to understanding the process. A collaborative involves school buildings, district offices, and university departments, but individuals must interact on behalf of these organizations to engender a partnership (Hord, 1986; Houston, 1979). Only after personal relations among members are established and regularized can collaborating institutions revamp existing practices and create alternative structures .

Some theorists, recognizing the importance of participant behavior, recommend studies examining specific factors that influence members' ability to mobilize and sustain a partnership. Among these factors, communication within a collaborative receives particular attention. Researchers are urged to explore how and why participants interact, the direction and intensity of information flow, impediments to communication, and the link between interaction patterns and partnership outcomes (Huberman & Levinson, 1984; Intriligator, 1983; Van de Ven, 1976).

This paper answers calls for research elaborating intra-partnership communication by examining two projects utilizing distinct collaborative approaches to alter curricular and instructional practice. Comparative, interpretive analysis focused on communication within these partnerships and its interaction with participants' sense of ownership and empowerment, willingness to innovate, and the degree to which change has been implemented. Findings are presented in the form of narratives describing each collaborative. To conclude the paper, the narratives are compared and contrasted, prompting some reflections and final comments. Study findings and reflections respond to the insistence that well-documented descriptions and comparative analyses of diverse collaboratives must be completed before partnerships realize their school improvement potential (Hord, 1986; Houston, 1979; Huberman & Levinson, 1984).

Method

The Project Settings

This research explores the nature and effects of communication within two school-university partnerships that differ in terms of scope,

structure, and logistics. McGowan, as principal investigator, initiated a school improvement collaborative with the staff of a Phoenix-area elementary school. The building serves an urban neighborhood that the principal terms "transitional" (i.e., becoming more ethnically and linguistically diverse and declining in terms of SES and community identity). Twenty-seven classroom teachers and 12 support personnel (e.g., reading specialists, a psychologist, special education and art/music/PE teachers) provide a comprehensive program for approximately 850 children.

Participants have titled the partnership "The Academic Alliance for Improved Social Studies Teaching," but proceed without written contracts or protocols. The governance structure evolves from a framework which McGowan, the principal, and two classroom teachers developed to ensure that the partnership reflects principles for effectively implementing change (i.e., that it is flexible, situation-specific, relatively egalitarian, practitioner-monitored, and directed at a problem which participants perceive). Teachers representing each grade level, the principal, and McGowan comprise a coordinating committee which sets policy, makes procedural decisions, and determines school-wide goals. Early in the partnership, the group used a consultative problem solving process (as outlined by Lee, 1986) to target aspects of social studies teaching for improvement. Committee members have not set operating procedures, a schedule, or an agenda, preferring to progress as staff interests and changing conditions dictate. Without external funding, the partnership has depended on the principal's staff development budget and a small university research grant to meet expenses.

The second partnership is more formal and larger in scope. Supported by a sizable foundation grant, a team of university faculty established "The Middle Grades Project," a collaborative to restructure and revitalize programs at three Indiana schools representing distinct approaches to middle grades education. Site A is a university laboratory school providing programs pre-kindergarten through grade 9, for students drawn from surrounding inner-city neighborhoods by requirement and from across the district by application. The project focuses on grades 6 to 9, and involves 24 staff members who provide instruction at those levels, including the principal, guidance counselor, media specialist, and classroom teachers. Site B is a middle school, grades 6 through 8, with 44 teachers, all project participants. The building is attached to the high school and features a traditional academic curriculum. At Site C, a rural junior/senior high school (grades 7-12), 26 teachers deliver subject area specialties to both junior and senior high students.

At the project's inception, participating institutions confirmed a formal governance structure including a director (the other principal investigator, Williams), annual budget, and project staff. Within this structure, ad hoc committees of teachers, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders have considerable latitude to interpret policy, formulate objectives, and determine operating procedures at each site. The three schools have also embraced a singular vision, accomodating existing programs to reflect a particular paradigm for middle grades education (as delineated by Lipsitz, 1984). To meet this mission, participants follow a 3-step school improvement plan, "Initiation/Implementation/Incorporation" (outlined in Waugh & Punch, 1987), reflecting five assumptions about

educational change advanced by theorists (Fullan, 1982; Hall & Hord, 1987; Joyce & Showers, 1988). During Initiation, each participating school was required to complete the Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP), a set of activities encouraging self-study and collaborative goal-setting (described in Dorman, 1984).

Data Sources and Analysis

Because of their primary roles in designing, organizing, and maintaining the two projects, McGowan and Williams generated the bulk of the data, but other participant observers contributed as well. In the Academic Alliance, McGowan observed classrooms, attended most social studies committee meetings, and interviewed committee members. The building principal also observed classrooms, convened committee sessions, and interviewed teachers building-wide. In the Middle Grades Project, Williams, as director, attended some local committee meetings, observed classrooms, prepared survey instruments, and interviewed participants. Additionally, a team of teachers, administrators, service staff, parents, and community agency personnel conducted the MGAP survey at each participating school. MGAP teams interviewed students, administrators, certified and classified staff members, and observed teachers during instructional sessions, providing rich and detailed data for this inquiry.

To ensure triangulation, a range of conversational, interview, written, and observational data were collected as the two projects progressed. Telephone calls were documented, minutes of meetings were compiled, and correspondence was preserved. Observers watched social studies lessons and committee meetings, recorded extensive field notes, and converted these data into anecdotal summaries. Selected participants from both

projects were interviewed regarding their attitudes toward collaboration, willingness to innovate, sense of efficacy, and the degree to which they implemented project-related changes. In the Middle Grades Project, most participants were also interviewed and later surveyed regarding their professional concerns, school improvement vision, and ability to promote transescent development/achievement.

Qualitative approaches were employed to process and analyze these data. Data were reduced by focusing inquiry on the nature and effects of intra-partnership communication, and by converting interviews and observational data into summaries and minutes. This body of information was examined in two ways. First, the two principal investigators reviewed summaries, documents, and minutes to construct a timeline for each project, and then reread summaries and minutes relevant to key events. Communication was categorized by source (i.e., who contacted whom?), type (i.e., telephone, written, or face-to-face?), and focus (i.e., project-related or not?), and frequency counts were tabulated for each category. Participant interactions were then reexamined in terms of the timelines to determine what, when, where, and how communication flowed within each project. Second, McGowan and Williams reviewed interview and observation summaries to assess the degree to which each project generated programmatic change, whether intended or not. After rereading this information and considering survey results, they ascertained how participants perceived educational change and their willingness to accommodate it.

From these data reviews and displays, a narrative was prepared to explicate each partnership. These descriptions integrate four elements: 1.)

the sequence of major events, 2.) the nature of participant communication, and 3.) the programmatic and attitudinal changes which collaboration generated, and 4.) the relationship between these products and participant interaction. To verify accuracy, a participant from each project critiqued the appropriate narrative which was then revised as necessary.

The Partnership Narratives

The Academic Alliance for Improved Social Studies Teaching

In August 1988, McGowan, newly arrived in the Phoenix area, approached a local social studies coordinator regarding opportunities for school-university collaboration in her suburban district. By October 1988, a meeting was arranged between McGowan, an elementary principal interested in awakening a "tired" social studies program, his building's social studies curriculum coordinator, and a "concerned teacher." These individuals launched the alliance during their initial planning session. The collaborators decided to proceed slowly, build trust among staff members, recruit a cadre of committed teachers, and target aspects of the K-6 social studies program for revision.

In late November, the principal took McGowan on a building tour and introduced him to selected teachers. Ten days later, at a regularly scheduled staff meeting, McGowan proposed the formation of an academic alliance, outlined how the partnership might function, and discussed its potential benefits and problem areas. Since response to this overture was very positive, he began visiting the school regularly to observe classrooms and get-acquainted with students and staff. Communication, at this point, was largely face-to-face, almost entirely partnership-related, flowed from

principal investigator to building staff, and involved a wide spectrum of practitioners.

The alliance's coordinating committee (ten teachers from across all grade levels, the principal, and McGowan) convened on January 11, 1989, and met again two weeks later. Using a consultative problem solving process, McGowan prompted the group to identify aspects of the school's social studies program which most needed attention. A consensus emerged that the partnership should acquaint teachers with teaching methods that boost student involvement; better articulate social studies within and across grade levels; integrate it with other subject areas; and reduce the breadth of topics which teachers must cover.

While accepting these goals, many committee members questioned their attainability, considering the alliance's limited resources, teachers' tight schedules, and the district's rigid, skills-oriented elementary curriculum. Discussion turned to school-wide activities that seemed feasible and might capture teachers' interest, but would still articulate, enliven, focus, and integrate the social studies program. McGowan and the principal floated several possibilities which the group rejected. A teacher then suggested a more appealing alternative. Each classroom would study a designated country throughout the 1989-90 academic year. Children would prepare exhibits describing its customs, arts, folklore, geography, economics, government, and history, and share these displays at a year-end World's Fair. The committee unanimously agreed to pursue this target and meet regularly to plan the celebration.

McGowan's role shifted abruptly from initiator and visitor to resource person and trouble-shooter following the committee meetings. Several

staff members approached him for assistance. Two sixth grade teachers needed speakers to present legal issues to their classes; McGowan secured law school students to deliver a mini-workshop series on the law and young people. The principal asked if "anyone there at the university" might assist teachers struggling to meet a Spanish-speaking first grader's special needs; McGowan found resource help for the boy through the university's bilingual education department.

As McGowan's credibility grew, the nature of participant interaction demonstrated subtle, but significant changes. The volume of communication grew markedly. Information started flowing from school to investigator as well as from investigator to school. Participants corresponded occasionally, but most interaction was face-to-face or by telephone. Increasingly, conversations digressed from alliance business, growing more personal and prone to "small-talk." Interaction seemed less regular and leisurely, occurring in bursts and flurries as participants sought solutions to a concern or instructional problem. McGowan, moreover, tended to concentrate on teachers requesting assistance. As his circle of contacts narrowed, a de facto "chain of command" emerged; the investigator interacted almost exclusively with the principal and six teachers who might then relay his comments to other interested staff members.

Several routines occupied alliance members as the spring progressed. The coordinating committee briefed the teaching staff regarding World's Fair activities and completed a series of preliminary planning tasks. Each grade level was assigned a country (e.g., first graders would learn about Japan, fourth graders would study Mexico), and certain group members gathered instructional materials for use the following year.

By mid-April, participants sustained alliance-related activity, but with less frequency and intensity than before. The coordinating committee met less regularly and members stopped their hunt for global education materials. McGowan, the principal, and the social studies coordinator wondered aloud if the partnership would yield meaningful effects. Teachers and the principal seemed distracted by events external to the alliance, particularly an extensive building renovation scheduled for that summer and the dislocation which this work caused. Publication deadlines forced McGowan to cancel several anticipated visits. At this point, intra-partnership communication dropped sharply in volume and again flowed from investigator to school personnel. Missed appointments and misinformation, moreover, frequently interrupted information exchanges and caused misunderstandings among participants.

The partnership revived somewhat with the appearance of ancillary activities in late April. McGowan's two sixth grade contacts approached him regarding an action-research project to be conducted the following year. The teachers had grown dissatisfied with the district's standardized management system, a variation on Canter's "assertive discipline" model. With McGowan's assistance, they would spend the summer developing a more interactionalist approach integrating children's literature, lunchtime sharing sessions, and self-expression exercises held after school. The teachers would implement this management plan in August and collect data to test its effectiveness as the 1989-90 school year progressed. A grant from the district's career ladder program would provide necessary resources.

Almost simultaneously, a university colleague approached McGowan with a second ancillary. He had listened to McGowan relate alliance activity while the two team-taught a methods course the previous fall. Intrigued by its potential, the colleague asked if he might join the partnership as a resource person and collaborate with teachers to improve science teaching. McGowan raised this offer with the principal who readily accepted. In mid-May, the two professors toured the school, observed selected classrooms, and met with teachers to explore science teaching options. The meeting disappointed McGowan and colleague as communication proved difficult, even strained at times, but the professors remained hopeful that a science subgroup would form.

The partnership's reawakening ended by late May. Year-end business preoccupied the teachers and limited alliance activity. McGowan visited the school and spoke with his regular contacts, particularly the principal. Their interactions seemed increasingly natural and often lengthy, rarely emphasizing partnership concerns. The principal stated that the World's Fair "seems pretty much on the back-burner." When school closed on June 2nd, the alliance basically suspended operations for the summer.

During June and July, the only partnership activity involved the action research project. The two sixth grade teachers volunteered to meet regularly and formulate their "new" management system. McGowan served as a bibliographic resource and joined them for seven work sessions. By August, the trio had submitted a proposal for district funding, researched various management systems, sketched guidelines for the alternative approach, developed activities, created an assessment instrument, and completed a bibliography of literature that promoted children's affective

growth. Working together, the teachers and the investigator related equally, easily, and productively, forging a personal bond.

With the school year approaching, McGowan and the principal met to plot a strategy which would raise the alliance's probability for success. Renovation had disrupted schedules and forced teachers to complete unwanted housekeeping tasks. While anxious to "get things up and rolling," the principal hesitated to "push our teachers too hard--we might lose what we've gained already." The collaborators decided to maintain the World's Fair's visibility, encourage action, but leave teachers the impetus for program development. McGowan would visit classrooms, be available as a resource person, and nurture relationships established the past spring.

School opened and, almost immediately, the partnership suffered a reversal. McGowan approached a primary teacher to schedule a follow-up meeting for the science teaching subgroup. To his surprise, the teacher labeled the professor's involvement with the alliance "a very bad idea," citing his "superior attitude" and inability to communicate with practitioners. She insisted that other teachers echoed her concerns. Staff members would complete the World's Fair project, but would not join any effort to improve science teaching. McGowan shared this incident with the principal who advised that he "back-off" rather than risk the partnership's future for ancillary activity. When tempers cooled, the principal would advise McGowan to again pursue the science teaching issue. To date, the principal has not done so despite McGowan's prodding on behalf of his colleague.

In contrast, the action research project proceeded smoothly and productively. The sixth grade teachers implemented their management

program in August, and have maintained it consistently since then. The teachers seem to relate to children more openly and positively than in past years. One reported that she isn't "yelling like I used to," and believes that her students are building stronger social participation skills and are better motivated than children experiencing an "assertive discipline" model.

In late September, World's Fair preparations renewed following the coordinating committee's first meeting of the school year. Committee members resolved several "loose-ends" at this session, including what would be studied and when the fair would be held. They also devised ways in which classrooms could share what they learned about particular countries. The group held monthly meetings through January and bi-weekly sessions after that. Agendas were flexible and responsive to questions brought to the committee by other staff members. By March, 1990, the committee had appointed teams responsible for the fair's logistics, secured parent help, specified the nature of classroom displays, and located the exhibit areas. Increasingly, members assumed responsibility for the World's Fair, and, independent of McGowan and the principal, took action to ensure its success.

The staff responded gradually to committee initiatives. Many teachers grumbled at first about increased workloads, the availability of materials, and the intrusion of World's Fair topics on an already crowded curriculum. By November, leaders emerged, exemplifying what creative practitioners could accomplish with the World's Fair concept. Their students constructed relief maps, questioned speakers, spoke foreign languages, retold folktales, learned songs, and wrote books describing faraway lands. Word of this activity spread throughout the school via daily

announcements, newletters, and bulletin boards. This inspired teaching made some, and kept a few teachers jealous, but most recovered their composure and determined to emulate their colleagues. By December, staff members responded to peer pressure and integrated World's Fair topics with the regular curriculum.

As "World's Fair Fever" spread, the nature of intra-partnership communication changed, facilitating innovation. Admittedly, many aspects of participant interaction were stable. McGowan still talked to the principal and his teacher contacts and they spoke to him. Most communication remained conversational. Volume remained high and the pace stayed irregular as events triggered moments of hectic interchange within longer periods of relative calm. Interaction was still relaxed and personal, with participants as likely to discuss Arizona weather or central office politics as the partnership's latest happenings.

What changed regarding intra-partnership communication was its scope and direction. As the World's Fair increasingly consumed staff attention, teachers formed support groups to gather materials, exchange teaching ideas, and share activity results. Most were tangential to the partnership's "parent network" (i.e., the principal, McGowan, and his teacher contacts), included at least one member of the coordinating committee, and spread the partnership's influence beyond its founders. These teacher networks resembled the parent network in terms of personal tone, high intensity, volume of interchange, and conversational mode, but differed in terms of directionality. Information flow was predominantly horizontal, not vertical. Networking teachers might talk to McGowan and the principal or vice versa; as a rule, they talked to each other and with

other teacher networks independent of investigator or principal. With the emergence of teacher networks, the pace of change accelerated, almost taking a "life of its own."

Although unaware he was doing so, McGowan encouraged awakening interest in the World's Fair and promoted the formation of teacher networks. Throughout the fall, he functioned primarily as a resource person, securing a small university grant to support the partnership, finding instructional resources, and sharing teaching ideas within his parent network. In November, McGowan briefly involved a university methods class with the partnership. The success of this experience prompted him to teach an entire course on-site this spring. Since January, his preservice students have regularly served as guest speakers and delivered lessons featuring World's Fair topics.

Viewed independently, these actions hardly seem earth-shaking, but, collectively, they have had a major impact. Teachers report that McGowan's egalitarianism and supportive, low-key manner made him approachable and credible. His visibility and practical contributions convinced staff members he was worth their time and effort. As teachers' trust and confidence in McGowan grew, so did their belief that his alliance idea was viable and might yield classroom benefits. Many teachers became more enthusiastic about the World's Fair, more receptive to partnership, more willing to innovate, and more convinced that their actions might improve social studies instruction school-wide. Eventually, these attitudinal shifts generated teacher behaviors that have produced meaningful innovations.

Change has come in both observable and not quite so tangible packages. Teachers, for example, devote more instructional time to social studies, in some cases doubling minutes per week and averaging a roughly 50% increase over last year. More social studies content is taught than ever before and than would have been taught without the partnership. Teachers employ a wider range of delivery systems (e.g., guest speakers, simulations, films, literature) and integrate other subject areas with social studies more than before. Staff members insist that children learn more social studies, noting that students seem "more up-to-date and current with events facing this world daily." Children ask more and better questions about countries around the world and the society in which they live than did students in previous years.

The social studies coordinating committee is another of the alliance's unique contributions. Teachers meeting regularly in small groups to plan social studies lessons might be an even more striking legacy. The partnership has also forced more systematic planning. Unlike past years, teachers have systematically examined K-6 social studies instruction and its relationship to other subject areas. Their deliberations have produced a scope and sequence, admittedly rough and activity-driven, but still a school-wide program culminating in the World's Fair.

Staff members not only do more social studies, they discuss it more. Before the alliance, articulation depended on obligatory, end-of-year sharing sessions in which the principal mandated that "people share what you're doing in social studies." Teachers now transmit program information spontaneously, naturally, and personally. As a result, program articulation

has increased dramatically. Staff members know what others are teaching and why they are teaching it.

Besides changing teacher practice, the alliance has apparently altered teacher perceptions. Practitioners like and value social studies more. They view the university as a less threatening and more helpful place, a legitimate resource for solving classroom problems. Teachers also express a growing sense of staff cohesiveness, pride in their school, and increased commitment to improve its programs, particularly in social studies. They report that the partnership rejeuvenated them professionally, promoted greater understanding of the teaching craft, and made them more likely to consider adopting alternative strategies.

Finally, teachers state repeatedly that the partnership boosted their sense of program ownership and empowerment. As one teacher suggested, "What we've done this year wasn't mandated. It's more like we were given the opportunity to carry out a program, make decisions, change those decisions as needed, and then implement them." Staff members more willingly sacrifice planning and after-school time for school-wide projects. Teachers admit that they have completed alliance-related tasks because "they were ours." Inspired by this sense of efficacy and ownership, teachers speculate about the future, anticipating what they might yet accomplish through collaboration.

The Middle Grades Project

The project's Initiation phase began in October, 1988, as the three participating schools selected teams to conduct the Middle Grades Assessment Program (MGAP). These groups varied in size, and included teachers, school service personnel, parents, and community agency staff.

MGAP enabled participants to self-assess school programs and operations in terms of nine criteria. Teams received formal training from project staff, formulated a data collection plan, and began the assessments. As the academic year progressed, they interviewed and observed every teacher at their respective schools as well as interviewing their principals, most classified staff members, and random samples of students and parents. In late spring, the MGAP teams met to compile and summarize their findings. Each group prepared a written report characterizing its school's ability to nurture young adolescent development, ensure students' physical and emotional safety, and promote their academic achievement.

Though time-consuming, the MGAP process yielded insights regarding how and why schools change, and illuminated the nature of participant interaction during the early stages of a school-university collaborative. Communication between the MGAP teams and the project staff was a mixture of telephone conversations and written correspondence, focused tightly on project business. As might be expected, interaction within teams was mainly face-to-face, with members conversing much more frequently than they had prior to assessment. Most talk centered on MGAP business items and potential programmatic changes, and seemed to generate different perspectives regarding school programs and students. The MGAP process afforded opportunities for teams to observe unfamiliar aspects of their schools and visit classrooms other than their own. Assessors reported greater appreciation of fellow teachers and program offerings. As one noted, "We do some good things at this school I was unaware of!"

MGAP veterans also reported a subtle, but significant shift in their perceptions of students. These teachers no longer accepted disruptive

behavior as a "given" in the middle grades. They began to explore how instructional strategies and school operations might contribute to this problem. Team members examined potential school improvements in terms of student welfare. Some transformed their classroom structures to accomodate young adolescent needs. Several adjusted schedules to allow students more time to move, adopted alternative teaching methods, utilized small group instruction more frequently, and posted broader samples of student work on bulletin boards. MGAP teachers generally reported more frequent contact with students outside the classroom. Apparently, the MGAP process not only assessed potential targets for school improvement, but served as a powerful change agent for team members.

Teachers not participating on the assessment team, however, viewed MGAP quite differently. Many expressed relief that they were not selected as assessors because they avoided so much additional work. Non-participants also hesitated to question team members regarding MGAP since they were not contributing the same high levels of effort to the process. Although they distanced themselves from MGAP to some extent, these teachers did admit that the interviews forced them to consider their teaching effectiveness and priorities for programmatic change.

The MGAP summary sessions provided points of departure for school improvement plans at the three participating schools. By design, teams should build the motivation, focus, skills, and specialized knowledge needed to generate meaningful innovation as they processed data and prepared final reports. In practice, assessors began meetings with preconceptions about their schools' key problems, greatly influencing session climate and communication patterns and almost predetermining primary targets for

change. Site A's team, for example, believed strongly that a disjointed discipline policy created most in-school difficulties. Throughout the summary session, members insisted that data, whatever its source or content, supported improving the school's management plan and focused discussion on this issue. Not surprisingly, the group overwhelmingly selected "the need for structure and clear limits" as its top priority.

With the MGAP findings summarized, the focus of activity shifted from data collection and analysis to completing four tasks: sharing final reports, explaining "the middle school concept" (i.e., a vision of middle grades education as defined by Lipsitz, 1984), introducing school improvement targets, and developing an action plan to meet them. Project staff met with each school's MGAP team leader and principal to devise a strategy for involving their entire staff in these four tasks. While specifics might differ, all strategies would initiate multiple activities simultaneously (e.g., sending teachers to visit exemplary middle schools and attend professional development seminars, while circulating reading materials) and feature a series of inservice workshops.

The spring workshop series greatly increased and intensified communication between the university and school sites. Project staff met frequently with a group at each site to finalize workshop plans and coordinate these sessions. While planning sessions produced many common elements, the workshop series demonstrated many differences. At Site B, the principal and MGAP team leader joined project staff in determining workshop content and delivering fairly structured presentations. Site C's principal, in contrast, identified ten teachers with high interest in middle school programs and appointed them as a workshop coordinating

committee. Throughout the series, he functioned as a facilitator helping the teachers with administrative details, but refused to dictate policy or mandate procedures. The principal maintained that if change was to occur, the group must "assume responsibility for making it happen."

Evaluations of the three workshop series indicated that they effectively introduced the middle school concept to school faculties. Sharing MGAP reports alerted staff members to problem areas within their respective schools and provided frameworks for advancing possible solutions to these difficulties. Even more encouraging for workshop organizers, teachers increasingly assumed leadership for designing and directing school improvement efforts. In the opening session of every workshop series, staff members seemed willing, as one principal commented, "to sit back and be instructed." As sessions focused more clearly on programmatic realities, workshop audiences became more vocal and animated. The final workshop at every school, in fact, exceeded the 2-hour time allotment. This growing sense of teacher efficacy excited project staff and promised significant effects once Implementation began.

Partnership advocates often maintain that collaboration empowers teachers, an effect which they perceive as universally beneficial. Yet, a caveat should be noted here regarding empowerment's less positive ramifications. At Site B's final workshop, discussion centered on courses of action for the fall semester, 1989. Several teachers spoke excitedly about interdisciplinary teaching and organizing students into "communities of learners." They sketched ways in which proposed summer planning sessions would help teachers acquire the skills needed to implement these innovations. Abruptly, one staff member voiced strong opposition, insisting

that he would seek another teaching position or simply leave education if summer inservice became mandatory. He also maintained that "a lot of other teachers feel the same way." His words quieted the faculty, dampened enthusiasm, and blocked their rush to initiate reforms. Teachers quickly decided that the summer months would be spent reflecting about change options rather than attending scheduled work sessions.

Empowered teachers may indeed generate programmatic change, but they may also, as at Site B, block innovation and confirm the status quo. A cautious staff unwilling to take risks, like the Site B faculty, are particularly prone to such conservatism. Seniority seems another factor influencing a faculty to take a reactionary stance. Younger teachers enthusiastically embraced change at Site B; their reactionary antagonist had 18 years of classroom experience. Uncertain of their position, the innovators yielded to the veteran voice of authority, abandoning a promising vehicle for change.

Although Site B teachers balked, empowered faculties at the other two sites planned and initiated summer activities with assistance from project staff. Site A staff members conducted the more ambitious summer program. To meet their school's top priority need (i.e., providing structure and clear limits), they concluded their spring workshop series by adopting a full complement of reforms reflecting the middle school concept (e.g., blocked/flexible scheduling, interdisciplinary teaching teams, and an advisor/advisee program). Most Site A teachers spent the four summer work sessions tackling each of these proposed reforms in turn. By August, they had prepared a master schedule, selected interdisciplinary teams, outlined possible thematic units, and established a rudimentary advisor

network. The faculty also scheduled a fifth workshop for mid-fall to evaluate progress and revise their initiatives as needed.

The Site C faculty held the first "summer" workshop during the last week of the 1988-89 academic year. During this 2-hour meeting, teachers reconsidered MGAP results and then brainstormed 20 programmatic changes they might institute during 1989-90. These initiatives were designed to distinguish the building's junior from its senior high unit and emphasize a separate identity for seventh and eighth graders. During the second, all-day session, teachers organized social events and clubs for junior high students, created a 7-8 student governance council, modified the master schedule, grouped junior high students into "families," sketched interdisciplinary units for the seventh grade program, and considered how to expand and spread unit teaching the following year. To acquaint parents with these program changes, workshop participants also planned a picnic for the start of the school year.

These summer work sessions allowed faculty to reflect and design programs without school-related interruptions. Participants expressed amazement at their productivity during the meetings. Project staff remarked constantly about the growth which teachers demonstrated. Staff members not only began to value their own ideas, they grew increasingly willing to assume responsibility for the outcomes of these proposals. More and more teachers observed, "We have the opportunity to really do something," or acknowledged, "It's all up to us!"

Such comments signalled a crucial shift in intra-partnership communication that would have major implications for the partnership's ability to facilitate school improvement. The project's university-based

staff no longer initiated and directed participant interaction and activity. Instead, professors reacted to teacher proposals, supported their implementation, and validated their effectiveness. After the summer workshops, information was as likely to flow from schools to university or school to school as from project headquarters to the field. Fewer memos were drafted and mailed; project business was increasingly transacted face-to-face or by telephone. Communication became less regular and much less driven by scheduled events. While interchange grew more informal and site-based, transmitted information also grew more situation-specific and credible for participants, increasing its likelihood for influencing teacher behavior and generating meaningful, lasting change.

Since they had projected ambitious school improvement agendas and completed detailed preparations over the summer months, two schools began Implementation as the 1989-90 school year began. Site A faculty radically altered school organization to permit team-teaching and flexible scheduling of student groupings. An interdisciplinary team was appointed for each level, grades 6-9, including an English, social studies, mathematics, and science teacher. Teams were provided a common planning period and a second free period for "personal preparation." Each team designed learning experiences for students at its assigned grade level, and distributed instructional time within a scheduled "block." This arrangement greatly increased and enhanced teacher-to-teacher communication and enabled teachers to focus conversation on school-related problems.

The first problem which the interdisciplinary teams confronted was the school discipline policy. At first, teams worked independently to draft alternatives to the existing management plan. Gradually, teams began to

consult other teams and share ideas. Within a month, the faculty voted to accept a new discipline policy that complemented an incentive/reward system piloted the previous spring. Teachers expressed confidence that they had significantly addressed the priority need identified during the MGAP process.

Interdisciplinary teams then tackled a second concern, translating the advisor/advisee program from promising ideas sketched the past summer to a functioning reality. Teams integrated advisor/advisee programs at three exemplary middle schools to create their school's plan. Teachers were assigned no more than 13 students each and met these advisees daily for 25 minutes. By November, these relationships were established and contributing to student welfare.

Completing these initiatives at Site A increased the quantity and enhanced the quality of interactions among teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and the principal. The principal assumed a very active role in this activity, attending meetings, engaging in discussion, providing resources, and responding to faculty requests. His positive leadership stance supported and encouraged Site A teaching teams as they struggled with Implementation.

Site C's school improvement activity was equally broad in scope. During their summer workshops, teachers projected 20 programmatic initiatives designed to establish a separate identity for the building's junior high unit. In the fall, the teachers began translating these proposals into functioning structures and programs. Teachers created a student senate for the seventh and eighth grades and encouraged this body to schedule a lunchtime recreation program, sponsor clubs and mixers, and promote

parent involvement at school. The faculty also revised the master schedule, allowing correlational studies in English and social studies, and held inservice sessions acquainting staff members with research regarding young adolescent development.

Interestingly, Site C's principal played a very different role in these proceedings than his Site A counterpart. Throughout the fall, Principal C, while strongly supporting his teachers, left planning and implementation tasks largely to them. Ten teachers repeatedly assumed leadership roles, volunteering time and taking responsibility for specific tasks. The principal came when called, but never intruded as teachers implemented change.

While success mounted at two schools, the project's Implementation phase was never fully operationalized at Site B. With the decision not to hold summer workshops, Initiation was continued into the fall. Teachers scheduled additional inservice meetings, reexamined the middle school concept, and visited more exemplary middle schools. By mid-semester, however, project-related communication dropped precipitiously. Teachers seldom interacted spontaneously about school improvement initiatives or discussed their implications. Few practitioners contacted the project office or solicited the director's assistance. Additionally, participation in the school's spring workshop series had been nearly 100%; fewer than 60% of Site B teachers regularly attended the fall workshop series.

While sharp drops in attendance and communication level suggest declining teacher interest, this conclusion might be misleading as two factors, one internal and one external, probably contributed to these difficulties. Site B teachers, first of all, started the project's second year without a contract. Following fruitless bargaining sessions, the school board

declared an impasse and the teachers enacted a modified work slowdown, working only from the start of classes until the dismissal of students. This situation forced Site B teachers to choose between honoring professional commitments to colleagues and pursuing meaningful programmatic change. Considering this dilemma, teacher absences and declining communication levels might have been caused by factors other than animosity or apathy toward the project.

Additionally, Principal B, while publicly supporting the Middle Grades Project, strongly believed that change initiatives must originate with teachers. Her conviction was so strong that she refused to mobilize change agents within her faculty or even to plant seeds among potential innovators. Unfortunately for the project, faculty members just as firmly believed the converse argument, and waited for their principal to seize the moment. Several teachers, in fact, indicated that change would only be accomplished if the principal "lays out what we are going to do." As another practitioner observed, "We are ready to do something. We just need someone to tell us what it is." Seemingly, the project languished at Site B as principal and teachers waited for each other to make something happen.

Throughout the fall, programmatic innovation flourished at two schools and stalled at the third. Paralleling these developments, a second level of project activity emerged as Williams and other university participants initiated activities ancillary to the project's main thrust. School of Education faculty, for example, instituted a middle school teacher certification program in August, 1989. These professors considered Site A ideal for providing preservice students first-hand experiences with

interdisciplinary team planning/teaching and nurturing advisor/advisee relationships. University faculty also perceived that student teachers might afford Site A teachers release-time to pursue school improvement efforts. Williams negotiated with university and school faculty to place practicum students at Site A.

Finally, a portion of the project grant had been designated to support a teacher-in-residence at the university for two years. Williams, with input from project staff and selected participants, chose a Site B teacher for this position and prepared a job description. Starting in the fall, 1989, this individual taught methods courses in middle school education, held ex officio committee memberships, and consulted with university faculty regarding "real-life" in middle schools. The grant also allowed practitioners from the three project sites to visit campus as guest speakers, consultants to other projects, colloquium panelists, and seminar members. Overall, Williams, the project staff, and school participants view these accomplishments as indicators of what they might achieve through collaboration in the future.

Reflections on Two Partnerships

Admittedly, our interpretive approach to data collection and analysis precludes our generalizing essential elements of school-university collaboration or issuing guidelines that will maximize any partnership's effectiveness. We can, however, "muse in public" regarding how certain collaborators have communicated with each other, the effects which two partnerships have produced, and the relationship between participant interaction and those effects. While offering no principles or axioms, we trust that our reflections will afford moments of insight and recognition

that promote better understanding of collaborative relationships in which readers might participate.

Additionally, we characterize the nature and effects of intra-partnership communication for two distinct collaborative approaches. Readers can discern many structural and procedural differences between the Academic Alliance and the Middle Grades Project. Despite these contrasts, we note similarities between these partnerships, particularly in terms of communication and its interaction with participants' sense of ownership and empowerment, willingness to innovate, and the degree to which change is implemented.

Both collaboratives, first of all, functioned largely as information exchanges, facilitating interaction among participants. Hidden agendas might have prompted their creation (e.g., a dean's belief that university faculty should be more visible in the public schools). Strong statements of purpose and good intentions might have provided them with identity and direction. But once operational, the partnerships existed to further interchange among educators fixed on a school improvement target, and can continue only as long as communication is facilitated. Without meaningful interaction, the collaboratives could linger for a while, but would eventually and certainly die, whatever their sense of mission, structural refinements, or funding sources.

By and large, information was exchanged orally (either face-to-face or by telephone); in response to stimuli; and generally, though not always, in linear fashion (e.g., university-to-school, practitioner-to-practitioner, school-to-university). Because of its size and structure, communication was more formalized and regular in the Middle Grades Project. By design, the

project instituted a fairly consistent, almost hierarchical communication network and transmitted much information in writing, at least during Initiation. During Implementation, oral communication began to predominate and lines of communication became less defined.

In the Academic Alliance, interaction was less directional and more responsive at the outset, often proceeding in bursts as events dictated rather than in a steady flow. Alliance communication also seemed increasingly personal and prone to digression, tendencies not noted in the Middle Grades Project. While the project's lines of communication seemed to blur over time, McGowan's circle of contacts within the alliance narrowed and fairly regular interaction patterns emerged, becoming almost a chain-of-command at times (e.g., McGowan to the principal to the coordinating committee to classroom teachers).

Communication within these two partnerships was influenced by both internal and external factors, although the nature of this impact was unpredictable and dependent on particular circumstances. The dynamic advocate was the most striking and perhaps the most influential of these factors. By force of will, an advocate could alter the volume, pace, and intensity of interchange or dramatically shift its direction. Such individuals made things happen (or stopped them from happening) by radiating information and/or cutting its flow. The teacher reactionary at the project's Site B and the alliance's pair of sixth grade action researchers exemplify the dynamic advocate in action and demonstrate that an advocate can influence a partnership positively or negatively. Advocates can make (or break) a successful partnership by their presence (or absence).

Additionally, external events can appear suddenly and alter participant morale dramatically. If such a mood shift is positive, communication levels within a partnership can soar; or, they can plummet if the swing is negative. The contract dispute at the project's Site B upset participants greatly and restricted their interaction. Similarly, building renovations distracted alliance participants, reducing levels of partnership-related interchange.

Within our two partnerships, personal politics was a third factor influencing information flow. In this context, politics does not denote statecraft or governance issues. Rather, political activity in a collaborative is much more personal, involving personality conflict, accomodating other viewpoints, competition for resources, and reaction to change (for a more complete definition, see McGowan, 1990). Throughout both alliance and project, participants struggled, maneuvered, contended, and sometimes battled over issues, reputations, and resources, often hampering intra-partnership communication in the process. The untimely demise of the alliance's science subgroup is clearly an example of personal politics at work.

Thus, project and alliance participants communicated orally, in fairly linear fashion, and through identifiable, if sometimes hazily defined networks. Their interchange seemed episodic and was often buffeted by dynamic advocates, external events, and personal politics. And, as they conversed or phoned or wrote, participants generated significant curricular and instructional changes.

Clearly, innovations were implemented to varying degrees in both collaboratives. Many alliance participants spent more school time teaching

social studies lessons, tried alternative methods for delivering social studies content, and reported increased student learnings as a result. A school-wide curricular initiative, the World's Fair, was adopted and a committee to coordinate it was appointed. Practitioners, moreover, could better articulate their school's social studies program after two years of academic alliance. Their attitudes toward social studies and the collaborating university improved markedly. Alliance participants have indicated a mounting sense of efficacy, ownership of new programs, and a willingness to pursue additional programmatic changes.

At two project sites, participants significantly restructured existing programs, and in doing so, created schools that more closely resemble the middle grades concept. They completed exhaustive MGAP surveys, adjusted schedules, built advisor/advisee relationships, reorganized traditional patterns for grouping students, and formed interdisciplinary teams. Perhaps more important, teachers assumed leadership for these initiatives, expressed a growing sense of empowerment/ownership, and demonstrated their commitment to the educational change process.

While hesitating to state that intra-partnership communication caused these effects, we are convinced that it was closely related to their appearance. Put simply (and we trust, not over-simply), participants touched by partnership-related interchange typically accomodated programmatic innovation. Participants who generated or facilitated interaction often initiated school improvement efforts. Wherever intra-partnership communication wandered, curricular and instructional change usually followed. Wherever interaction flourished, innovation quite often originated.

Perhaps, and we must admit that we venture onto speculative ground at this point, increased communication boosted the collaborators' sense of ownership and kindled their growing empowerment. The more they heard about an innovation, the more comfortable, viable, and familiar it felt to them. A proposed change became less threatening and began to seem worth adopting, or at least adapting. Alliance and project participants heard about a program option first-hand rather than reading about it second or third-hand, and they heard about it from friends and associates. The innovation became not only "mine," but "ours." As practitioners envisioned and implemented programmatic changes, they found support from familiar faces and surroundings. Teachers gained confidence and conviction with each conversational interchange. Teacher efficacy can be a frightening prospect because of its accompanying accountability. Facing these new responsibilities with friends and associates might ease the pain of empowerment considerably.

Admittedly, ownership and efficacy are intensely personal attributes that can be very difficult to foster. Yet, partnership seems an intensely personal, communication-rich process that can instill even the most elusive and private qualities in participants. We would submit that collaborative interaction encouraged a sense of ownership and efficacy in alliance and project participants making them more willing to change and more likely to implement new instructional or curricular programs.

We close with a much less speculative observation that seems crucial to understanding the relationship between intra-partnership communication and programmatic change. In both alliance and partnership, interaction seemed a prerequisite for innovation. When

participants talked, they then accepted, adopted, and adapted. Once intra-partnership communication flowed in directions other than from university to school, participants exchanged more ideas with greater frequency. In the alliance, for example, teachers began initiating conversation with the principal and McGowan, and interacting regularly with each other regarding partership business. Practitioners formed communication networks beyond McGowan's circle of regular contacts. Information still proceeded from McGowan to the principal and to teacher, but flowed in many other directions as well. Similarly, participant interaction at project Sites A and C broadened in scope, increased in volume, and opened new directions during the summer workshop series.

At both partnerships, communication levels increased, the impetus for interaction passed from professors to practitioners, and the pace of change accelerated markedly. We recognize that simply encouraging participant interaction and building new communication pathways does not guarantee that a collaborative generates curricular and instructional innovation. Many variables beyond intra-partnership communication influence the change process. Still, our research assures us that collaboratives can be used to design, introduce, and manage school improvement initiatives. We are also convinced that facilitating and broadening the scope of participant interaction makes a partnership even more likely to effect meaningful school improvement.

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